

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-15

USIA-15 ACDA-19 IO-13 EB-11 OMB-01 DRC-01 /142 W

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R 241718Z SEP 73

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4195

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: UK, PINT

SUBJECT: THE LIBERAL PARTY ASSEMBLY 1973

REF: LONDON'S 10627

1. SUMMARY: AT A HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL CONFERENCE IN SOUTHPORT LAST WEEK, LIBERALS MADE CREDIBLE THEIR CLAIM TO BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY AS A THIRD FORCE IN BRITISH POLITICS. SHORT ON MONEY AND ORGANIZATION, BUT LONG ON ENTHUSIASM, THEY PITCHED THEIR APPEAL TO THE ORDINARY CITIZEN WHO FEELS ALIENATED AND POWERLESS IN TODAY'S SOCIETY. THEY PROPAGATED AN ARRAY OF

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POLICIES AIMED AT REDUCING AND DECENTRALIZING THE

POWERS OF GOVERNMENT AND ENHANCING THE ROLE OF THE INDIVIDUAL. THEY ALSO REAFFIRMED THEIR COMMITMENT TO BRITISH MEMBERSHIP OF THE EC, BUT OF AN EC REFORMED ALONG LIBERAL LINES. BUOYED BY A RISING TIDE OF POPULAR SUPPORT, YET SOBERED BY THE FORMIDABLE TASKS OF CHALLENGING THE TWO MAJOR PARTIES, MOST LIBERALS LEFT SOUTHPORT CONVINCED THAT THEY WERE FINALLY ON THE LONG HARD ROAD BACK TO POWER. END SUMMARY.

2. THE BRITISH LIBERAL PARTY IS ALIVE AND WELL. IT STAGED ITS MOST SUCCESSFUL POSTWAR CONFERENCE AT SOUTHPORT LAST WEEK AND MADE CREDIBLE ITS CLAIM TO BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY AS A THIRD FORCE IN BRITISH POLITICS. UNDER THE SLOGAN "FORWARD WITH THE PEOPLE," IT RE-AFFIRMED ITS RELIANCE ON COMMUNITY POLITICS AS THE BASIS OF ITS NATIONAL REVIVAL, -- ITS FAITH IN THE IDEAL, AT ONCE RADICAL AND OLD-FASHIONED, THAT AT ALL LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT ORDINARY PEOPLE SHOULD TAKE AN ACTIVE PART IN THE SHAPING OF DECISIONS THAT AFFECT THEM. THIS FAITH RUNS DEEP AMONG LIBERALS, ESPECIALLY THE NUMEROUS YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE PARTY, AND GOES FAR BEYOND THE EXPLOITATION OF LOCAL GRIEVANCES FOR THE SAKE OF WINNING VOTES TO ENVISAGE AN EVENTUAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE VERY NATURE OF THE POLITICAL SYSTEM.

3. SENSITIVE TO THE CHARGE THAT THE LIBERAL PARTY HAS NO POLICIES, AND CONSCIOUS THAT THEY WERE ENJOYING WHAT WAS FOR THEM UNPRECEDENTED MEDIA COVERAGE, LIBERALS LAST WEEK PROPAGATED A SPATE OF POLICIES, OLD AND NEW, ON A WIDE RANGE OF ISSUES. CONCEDING THAT SOME INFLATION WOULD BE A PERMANENT FEATURE OF THE ECONOMIC SCENE FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE, THEY CALLED FOR CONTROLS ON BOTH PRICES AND WAGES TO REDUCE THE RATE OF INFLATION, AND A MINIMUM WAGE, HIGHER PENSIONS, AND VARIOUS TAX CREDIT SCHEMES TO MITIGATE ITS EFFECTS ON THE POOR.

4. THEY CALLED FOR THE REPEAL OF THE INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS ACT AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF WORKS COUNCILS AND A TWO-TIER SYSTEM OF MANAGEMENT TO GIVE EMPLOYEES LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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A SHARE IN THE DIRECTION AND OPERATION OF INDUSTRY. INVOKING SHADES OF HENRY GEORGE, THEY CALLED FOR THE INTRODUCTION OF A LAND TAX BASED ON THE PRINCIPLE THAT WEALTH (I.E. - THE VALUE OF UNIMPROVED LAND), CREATED BY THE COMMUNITY AS A WHOLE SHOULD BE RETURNED TO BE USED BY THE COMMUNITY AS A WHOLE.

5. THEY CALLED FOR THE CREATION OF SEPARATE PARLIAMENTS

FOR WALES, SCOTLAND, AND VARIOUS REGIONS OF ENGLAND,
THE INTRODUCTION OF PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION BASED
ON THE SINGLE TRANSFERRABLE VOTE, FIXED-TERM ELECTIONS,
RELAXATION OF PARTY DISCIPLINE IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS,
AND A THOROUGH RESTRUCTURING OF THE HOUSE OF LORDS.
THEY REAFFIRMED THE LIBERAL PARTY'S COMMITMENT TO
BRITISH MEMBERSHIP OF THE EC, BUT CALLED FOR THE DIRECT
ELECTION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND A DRASTIC
REFORM OF THE CAP.

6. THEY ALSO PASSED RESOLUTIONS DEALING WITH EDUCATION,
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HOUSING, THE STATUS OF WOMEN, PUBLIC TRANSPORT, COMPETITION IN INDUSTRY, ENERGY POLICY, TENANTS' COOPERATIVES, AND THE ROLE OF THE POLICE. MANY OF THESE POLICIES WILL NEED CONSIDERABLE REFINING AND COSTING AND INTEGRATION INTO A RATIONAL ORDER OF PRIORITIES, BUT ALL OF THEM WERE MOTIVATED BY WHAT THE PARTY'S RECENTLY ISSUED POLICY DOCUMENT (REFTEL) TERMED "CONCERN FOR THE INDIVIDUAL." FURTHERMORE, THEY WERE ADVANCED IN A PRAGMATIC, NON-DOCTRINAIRE WAY THAT CONTRASTED MARKEDLY WITH THE IDEOLOGICAL, CLASS-ORIENTED POLICIES THAT HAVE BEEN DEVELOPED BY THE LABOR PARTY OVER THE PAST YEAR.

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7. THE DELEGATES AT SOUTHPORT WERE RELAXED AND HAPPY. YOUNG PEOPLE WERE ACTIVE EVERYWHERE AND RELATIONS BETWEEN THE GENERATIONS WERE MARKEDLY HARMONIOUS. DEBATE WAS LIVELY BUT NEVER PERSONALLY BITTER. THERE WAS LITTLE EVIDENCE OF FACTIONALISM. AFTER WANDERING IN THE POLITICAL WILDERNESS FOR HALF A CENTURY AND BEING TWICE DISAPPOINTED IN THE POSTWAR ERA BY TEMPORARY REVIVALS THAT CAME TO NOTHING, LIBERALS SEEM DETERMINED TO KEEP THIS REVIVAL GOING.

8. THEY ARE SOBERLY AWARE, HOWEVER, OF THE ENORMOUS OBSTACLES THEY FACE AND THE DEFICIENCIES, ESPECIALLY IN THE AREAS OF PARTY INFRASTRUCTURE AND FINANCE, THEY MUST CORRECT. THE LOCAL PARTY ORGANIZATIONS IN ROUGHLY ONE-THIRD OF THE NATION'S CONSTITUENCIES ARE CURRENTLY DERELICT. TREVOR JONES, SPARKPLUG OF THE LIBERAL ACCESSION TO POWER IN LIVERPOOL AND OF LAST DECEMBER'S BY-ELECTION UPSET AT SUTTON AND CHEAM, WILL DEVOTE THE COMING YEAR TO TRYING TO REVITALIZE THEM. MONEY, AS ALWAYS, IS IN SHORT SUPPLY, AND THE PARTY HAS STILL NOT MADE UP ITS MIND WHETHER AND UNDER WHAT CONDITIONS IT SHOULD RELAX ITS HITHERTO VIRTUOUS REFUSAL TO ACCEPT LARGE CONTRIBUTIONS FROM INDUSTRIAL AND COMMERCIAL ORGANIZATIONS. THE ROAD BACK TO POWER IS A LONG AND DIFFICULT ONE, BUT AFTER LAST WEEK THERE WERE FEW LIBERALS WHO DID NOT BELIEVE THEY WERE FINALLY ON THE WAY.

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